

Take It Easy

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Summary: A Tintin/Death crossover. Written for the CFAN Holiday Project, and a sequel to "Just Wasted Time".

## Take It Easy

Tintin and Captain Haddock are Herge's, Death is Vertigo's, the disease is mine. ;) (No, I don't mean it that way!)

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"Thundering typhoons, Tintin, are you coming down or am I going to have to drag you?"

"I'm coming, I'm coming." Tintin shuffled out of his room and padded down the stairs, barefoot. He found Captain Haddock in the living room, standing on a small ladder in order to reach the upper parts of the Christmas tree. Tintin half-smiled as he remembered how a two-foot plastic tree was once all the Captain had to decorate his small apartment -- now that Haddock lived in a big spacious mansion like Marlinspike Hall, he could furnish his home with eight-feet-high trees such as this one.

He treaded nearer and looked up at the Captain, who was busy fiddling with the angel ornament that was supposed to go on top of the tree. "Looks good, Captain," he said. "You really outdid yourself on this one."

"Bah, it isn't even finished yet." The older man glanced down. "Are you all right?"

Tintin nodded. "Just the knee as usual, but nothing serious. Need me to do anything?"

"The tinsel. You're the only one who can handle it properly." He scowled and made a jab at the angel ornament. "Stay there, you

inanimate object!"

The angel continued to smile sweetly before dropping off the top of the tree.

"Blistering barnacles!" The Captain fumbled before managing to catch it, then rammed the angel down the tip of the fir. He spluttered incredulously when it tumbled back into his hands. "Billions of blue blistering barnacles! You paramesium! Rhizopod! Bashibazouk! Vermicellis! Octopus! Duck-billed platypus -"

Tintin stifled a chuckle as he sat down on the floor. He always was amused by the Captain's way of swearing. The hot-tempered Haddock gave new meaning to the term "colorful language."

"You wouldn't consider it blasphemous to say such things to an angel, would you, Captain?" he teased. "Especially on a day such as this one?"

Haddock slapped a large hand over his bearded mouth, but glared at the angel ornament. Christmas Eve or no, certain objects needed a firm talking to. Finally he stormed down from the ladder. "I'll show this centipede who's boss," he growled, marching out of the room with the angel tightly within his grip. Tintin shook his head in bemusement before continuing his assigned duty of layering the tree with tinsel. Somewhere in the distance he could hear faint mutters of "buck-toothed sententious sycophant" and the like.

He straightened to stand on his knees in order to reach a higher branch. The next minute he lay gasping on the floor, both arms wrapped around his left shin. White stars danced somewhere in the horizon.

His knee was radiating with growing pain, again. Strike one for Mr. Cancer. Tintin dragged in deep ragged breaths, which were quickly expelled by eleven seconds of non-stop coughing. He lay there on his side, wheezing for what seemed like ages until he was certain his breathing had stabilized. He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to think of happy thoughts.

Well, at least I'm not coughing up blood.

Not yet, anyway.

He grimaced and slowly hauled himself to sit upright, left leg bent vertically while his right rested horizontally. Placing his fingers delicately on his left knee, he began massaging it with extreme slow motion. The pain only increased until it was near agony, and Tintin had to bite his lower lip in order to keep from crying out loud. He shut his eyes so hard that he saw bright red underneath his eyelids, and a whistling roar echoed in his ears. He didn't know how long it took for the pain to fade away, all he knew was that it took too long.

How long before I lose all my hair? Until it hurts to even get out of bed, or breathe? Already there were days when he had to limp all the way into the bathroom, then sit on the edge of the tub and wait out the wave of pain. Sometimes it took fifteen minutes, sometimes fifty. And it always made him tremble.

When the throbbing finally eased, he realized he was sweating. He also realized that a pair of black-jeans-clad legs were standing in front of him. He lifted his eyes and felt an odd sense of contentment to see the familiar, pale thin girl looking down at him with sympathetic eyes.

"Hey," she said. "How're you doing?"

He managed a shrug, even though his shoulders felt sore and strained. "I've. . . been better."

"Argh." She dropped to the floor, twisting into a smooth cross-legged position as she sat down in front of him. "Cliche! Trite phrase. Don't use it, please. It's been overdone more times than you can imagine. I'm an authority on the subject."

He eyed her and she grinned, her teeth as white as her skin. Her black hair was as unruly and matted as always, and she slipped a hand into it to scratch her head. "Seriously, you okay? You look really pale."

He tried to chuckle but it turned into a cough instead. "Me, pale? You could probably give me a run for my money."

"It's in my blood. Me and my family's. We're all pearly-skinned." She thumped his back a few times as the cough continued, but it wasn't so bad this time, barely three seconds' worth. It was the heavy breathing that was mostly the concern. "Are you supposed to take anything for that?"

"Most of my painkillers and medication are up in my room. I should've brought them down with me." He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, eyes half-lidded with fatigue. "It's good to see you, by the way. Thanks for dropping by, even though I know you're busy."

"Hey, you wanted visits, you've got visits." She waved at the large fir tree beside them. "Very nice. Chose it yourself?"

"The Captain, mostly. I helped."

"So you've been going outdoors. Good, you need the air. Where's ol' Bluebeard, anyway?"

Tintin grinned in spite of himself. So far only Haddock's enemies and rivals called him "Bluebeard", but the way she said it didn't make it seem so bad. "He's gone to fix a problem with an angel."

"Ah, yes, angels." She nodded sagely. "They can be such aggravating creatures sometimes."

He eyed her warily, not knowing whether to take her seriously or not. She burst out into light chimed laughter. "Stop thinking so much, Tintin. It's the season to be merry!" She grabbed a handful of tinsel and stood up on tip-toe to reach the higher branches. The curious symbol-object that hung from around her neck gently nudged against her too-low-cut tank top.

He watched her from the floor, regulating his breath. So far Tintin had not had the chance to stand directly next to the girl, but he could safely judge that she was shorter than him. It suddenly

occurred to him how picturesque the scene must look -- a young girl whose wild black hair contrasted greatly against her pale skin, scattering gold and silver threads onto a rich-forest-green tree bedecked with various colorful ornaments. Her eyes gleamed and she was laughing a silent laugh. Black and white standing out against multiple shades and hues. Death surrounded by a celebration of a birth.

He waved to get her attention and gestured at the object hanging around her neck, which looked like a cross with a looped top. "What's that?"

"This? It's an ankh."

"Ankh." He rolled the word around in his tongue for a while, tasting it like wine. "Nice name."

"I didn't give it the name." She grinned. "Egyptian background, stands for life after death. Rebirth. 'Nem Ankh', 'Eternal Life'."

"I've never gone to Egypt before," Tintin said wistfully. "I'd love to. I want to see the pyramids. I've been to Peru once, but was nearly burned down as a sacrificial offering to Amon-Ra. . ."

She chuckled. "Hey, I gotta go now. Things to do, people to see. I'll drop by again next time, okay?"

"Oh. Okay." He didn't want her to go just yet, but he knew how busy she was, what little free time she had. One part of him was grateful that she had come, another part was missing her already. "Thanks for coming. It was good to see you." He could feel a growing red throb in his knee and grimaced. "Wait, could you - could you help me across the hall? I think I have some painkillers in the next room."

She nodded sympathetically and looped his right arm around her shoulders. It was funny, Tintin thought, this smaller-sized young girl helping him to limp across the corridor -- but he lost this train of thought as his throat constricted and he tried to drag in deep breaths, and he forgot the reason why it was supposed to be funny.

They made it to the doorway of the other room before he spoke. "Isn't it sad that. . ."

"That?"

"That you have to work on Christmas Eve."

She smiled. "Isn't that a bit Eurocentric of you, Tintin? That this particular holiday should be more important than others?"

"No, I didn't mean that -"

"Everyone gets equal spotlight. Look at the Chinese New Year -- a besieged-with-red prosperous occasion. I see people then. I also see people during Aidilfitri, Deepavali, Cinco de Mayo, Kwanzaa, birthdays, anniversaries, reunions, weddings. . . Every day is important, Tintin. Every day is special."

He coughed. "So every day is a sad day to die?"

She grinned. "Every day is a good day to live." She touched her ankh. "Eternal life, Tintin -- remember that. We continue living in our own way."

He found the pills in one of the drawers, and she poured him a glass of water from a jug nearby. "Hey, remember the spirit of the season," she said, tilting her head to one side. "This is one of my favorite holidays. People celebrating a person's birth - and his life - even after he's long gone. Death is not the end of the world. Don't let important things like that, memories like that, fade away."

"We don't. I don't. It just. . . helps to remind us, in case we should ever forget."

She shrugged. "Well, just as long as you don't."

He gulped down the pills and followed it with water. When he looked up, he was alone in the room.

One of these days I should ask her how she manages to do that.

After a few minutes of rest, he padded back to the living room to continue with the tinsel. When he returned to the scene, however, he stood stock still and stared. He finally burst out into a good long laugh.

Captain Haddock was standing on the ladder, fists on hips as he looked at the tree triumphantly. The angel ornament had been duct-taped to the top of the tree.

Take it easy, take it easy / Don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy / Lighten up while you still can / Don't even try to understand / Just find a place to make your stand / And take it easy

-- "Take It Easy" by the Eagles

End

Maelstrom :)

End  
file.